

VODOU PERISTYLE VISITATION GUIDE

Haiti and the African Diaspora

*Not Voodoo. Not horror. Not what Hollywood taught you. A complete
sacred tradition — the same one that sustained
the only successful slave revolution in history.*

The Lwa arrive through the drums. They are not metaphors.

The poteau mitan connects heaven and earth.

The veve drawn on the floor calls a specific presence.

If you arrive with sincerity and respect, you will be welcome.

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Introduction

The first thing to understand about attending a Vodou ceremony is what you are not walking into. You are not walking into a horror movie. You are not walking into black magic. You are not walking into a dangerous encounter with demonic forces. These images are racist fabrications — constructed by colonial powers to dehumanize the Haitian people who used their sacred tradition to fuel the only successful slave revolution in history, and maintained by media and entertainment industries that have never investigated the actual tradition.

What you are walking into: a complete, sophisticated, living sacred tradition that has sustained millions of people through centuries of suffering. A theology organized around the Lwa — divine forces with specific personalities, specific domains, and specific gifts — who arrive through the medium of drumming, sacred song, and the willing bodies of initiated devotees. A community that gathers regularly to maintain their relationship with the sacred, to share food, to sing, to dance, and to receive direct guidance and healing from divine presences. A tradition of extraordinary beauty, extraordinary depth, and extraordinary warmth toward sincere visitors.

Access to Vodou ceremony as an outside visitor requires effort, respect, and the right approach. It is not a tourist attraction you can purchase a ticket to. It is a community's living sacred life, and the appropriate way to access it is through relationship — through the Haitian and diaspora communities that maintain it, through Houngans and Mambos who may welcome sincere visitors to specific ceremonies, and through the quality of genuine respect and genuine curiosity that communicates itself even across language barriers. This guide prepares you for that access.

What a Peristyle Is

The peristyle (also called *ounfò* — the Vodou temple) is the primary sacred space of the Vodou community — simultaneously a sacred building, a community center, a healing space, and the home territory of the specific Lwa whose presence is most concentrated there. It is not a grand architectural monument. Most peristyles are modest — a large covered space, open on the sides, with a central post (the *poteau mitan*) and specific altars around the periphery.

THE PERISTYLE AT A GLANCE

WHAT IT IS: The sacred community space of a Vodou *ounfò* (temple community) **WHO RUNS IT:** A Houngan (male priest) or Mambo (female priest) who is the spiritual head of the community **THE CENTRAL ELEMENT:** The *poteau mitan* — the central post through which the Lwa descend from the invisible world **THE FLOOR:** Often decorated with *veve* (sacred geometric diagrams of the Lwa) drawn in cornmeal or ash during ceremonies **THE ALTARS:** Specific altars for specific Lwa around the periphery, maintained continuously **CEREMONY FREQUENCY:** Regular ceremonies (*fèt* — feasts) occur for specific Lwa on specific days, plus major ceremonies for special occasions **VISITOR ACCESS:** Some ceremonies are open to respectful observers; others are private. Always check with the Houngan or Mambo before attending.

The Theology

Bondye, the Lwa, and the Two Worlds

Understanding the basic theological structure of Vodou transforms the peristyle experience from a confusing series of events into a coherent, intelligible sacred practice. The full theology has been covered in the Vodou deep dive in the Haligricity Personal Reading Series — this section is a focused summary for the visitor.

VODOU THEOLOGY IN BRIEF

BONDYE: The supreme divine — too remote and too complete to be directly petitioned by finite human beings. All Vodou practice flows toward Bondye through the mediation of the Lwa. **THE LWA:** The divine intermediaries — each a specific divine force with a specific personality, specific domain, specific colors, specific foods, and specific ways of working with human beings. They are not demons. They are divine. The Lwa arrive at ceremony through the medium of the drums, the songs, and the initiated devotees whose bodies they temporarily inhabit. **ANBA DLO (BENEATH THE WATERS):** The invisible world — the realm of the Lwa, the ancestors, and the divine forces that sustain life. It is not a separate universe; it interpenetrates the visible world continuously. **THE TWO NATIONS:** • **RADA:** The cool, ancient, generally benevolent Lwa from the African homeland — Legba, Marasa, Damballah, Erzulie Freda. Their ceremonies use slower rhythms and cooler offerings. • **PETWO:** The hot, fierce, New World Lwa born from the experience of Haitian slavery — Erzulie Dantor, Met Kalfou, the Petwo Ogou. Their ceremonies use faster, more urgent rhythms. • **GEDE:** The nation of the dead — Baron Samedi, Maman Brigitte, and the ancestors. They govern death, transformation, and healing. **THE HORSE AND THE RIDER:** When a Lwa descends into an initiated devotee, the devotee is the horse (chwal) and the Lwa is the rider. The devotee's ordinary personality is temporarily set aside and the Lwa's presence fully inhabits the body.

The Physical Space

Reading the Peristyle

WHAT YOU WILL SEE IN A PERISTYLE

THE POTEAU MITAN (Central Post): The most sacred element — the cosmic axis through which the Lwa descend from the invisible world. Typically painted with spiraling serpents representing Damballah and Ayida Wedo. Everything in the ceremony radiates from this post.

THE ALTARS (PWEN): Around the periphery of the peristyle, specific altars for specific Lwa. Each altar contains: the Lwa's specific colors (in cloth, candles, flowers), their specific sacred objects (a skull for the Gede, mirrors and perfume for Erzulie Freda, iron implements for Ogou), their specific foods and drinks (rum for Gede and Ogou, honey and sweet things for Erzulie Freda, cool water for Damballah), and their veve either permanently displayed or drawn fresh at ceremony.

THE DRUMS: The rada drums (three drums of different sizes — manman, segon, boula) and/or Petwo drums, played by initiated drummers. The drums are sacred instruments — not simply percussion but living sacred presences whose specific rhythms call specific Lwa.

THE OGAN (Iron Bell): The iron bell that marks the rhythmic foundation of the ceremony — played continuously by a designated musician throughout the fèt.

THE COMMUNITY (OUNSI): The initiated members of the ounfò — those who have gone through kanzo (Vodou initiation). They sing, they dance, they receive the Lwa.

THE HOUNGAN/MAMBO: The priest or priestess who leads the ceremony — directing the sequence, managing the Lwa who descend, interpreting for the community, and ensuring the sacred integrity of the event.

VISITORS: Welcomed in the outer areas of the peristyle during public ceremonies, seated or standing respectfully along the walls.

Part Four

The Poteau Mitan The Cosmic Axis

The poteau mitan (middle post) is the most sacred physical object in the peristyle — the central wooden or concrete post that stands at the center of the ceremony space and serves as the material connection between the invisible world (anba dlo — beneath the waters) and the visible world of the ceremony. The Lwa descend from the invisible world through this post, entering the ceremony space through the point where the cosmic axis intersects the earthly plane.

The Serpent Design

The poteau mitan is typically painted with spiraling serpents winding from the base upward toward the ceiling — representing Damballah Wedo and Ayida Wedo, the great serpent Lwa who are among the most ancient and most sacred in the tradition. Damballah is the great white serpent associated with ancient wisdom and the cosmic order; Ayida Wedo is the rainbow serpent, his consort, representing the arc of the cosmos that connects earth and sky. Their spiraling forms on the poteau mitan represent the cosmic axis itself — the DNA-like double helix of the two serpents winding around the central post is one of the most ancient sacred geometric forms in the world.

What Happens at the Poteau Mitan

During ceremony, the veve for the specific Lwa being called is drawn at the base of the poteau mitan in cornmeal or ash. Offerings are placed at its base. The ceremony's most intense dancing occurs around it. When a Lwa descends into a devotee, the moment often occurs near the poteau mitan — the point where the cosmic axis is most concentrated and the Lwa's descent is most direct.

CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY

The poteau mitan — the vertical axis connecting the invisible and visible worlds, the specific material point through which the divine descends into the ceremony space — is the Vodou articulation of what every sacred tradition holds about the cosmic axis. The Shinto torii gate marks the threshold between ordinary and sacred. The Hindu temple's shikhara tower points to heaven above the garbhagriha. The Balinese meru tower rises toward the mountain of the gods. The World Tree of shamanic tradition connects the three worlds. The poteau mitan is the Haitian African expression of the same universal recognition: there is a specific point where the vertical dimension of the sacred intersects the horizontal plane of ordinary life, and that intersection can be marked, honored, and used as the portal for divine arrival. The Haligric practitioner who opens sacred space through specific ritual — marking the center, acknowledging above and below — is engaging the same principle as the poteau mitan.

The Veve

Sacred Diagrams on the Floor

The veve are the most visually distinctive element of Vodou ceremony — intricate geometric diagrams drawn on the floor of the peristyle, typically in cornmeal, ash, coffee grounds, or gunpowder, at the base of the poteau mitan and before the specific altars of the Lwa being called. Each Lwa has their own specific veve — a unique sacred diagram that simultaneously represents the Lwa's identity, calls their presence, and creates the energetic conditions within which their descent is most likely.

MAJOR VEVE AND THEIR LWA

LEGBA'S VEVE: A cross with specific decorative extensions — the crossroads itself made geometric. Legba's veve is the first drawn at every ceremony, because Legba must open the gate before any other Lwa can arrive. **DAMBALLAH'S VEVE:** Two intertwined serpents — the cosmic double helix of Damballah Wedo and Ayida Wedo. One of the most ancient and most recognizable sacred forms in the tradition. **ERZULIE FREDAS VEVE:** A heart with a crown and crossed swords — love, royalty, and the blade's edge of love's pain. Her veve is among the most beautiful in the tradition. **OGOU'S VEVE:** Specific military imagery — often featuring a sword, a flag, and geometric patterns associated with war and iron. **BARON SAMEDI'S VEVE:** A coffin, a cross, and specific geometric patterns — the cemetery and the threshold of death rendered in sacred geometry. **THE ACT OF DRAWING:** The veve is not merely a symbol painted on the floor. It is an act of sacred technology — the precise drawing of the specific form is itself a calling, and a veve correctly drawn focuses the energetic conditions of the ceremony toward the specific Lwa it represents. A veve incorrectly drawn or incompletely drawn can be actively problematic — the drawing must be done by a trained practitioner who knows the exact form for each Lwa. **FOR VISITORS:** Do not photograph the veve during active ceremony — the veve is a living sacred form while the ceremony is in progress. Observing it respectfully is appropriate; photographing it repeatedly with a flash is not.

The Altars

What You Will See and What It Means

The permanent altars of the peristyle — maintained continuously between ceremonies — are the material homes of the specific Lwa who are served by that *ounfò*. They are not decorative installations. They are the Lwa's actual residences in the physical world, maintained through regular offerings, regular prayers, and regular care by the Houngan/Mambo and the initiated community.

ALTAR ELEMENTS AND THEIR MEANINGS

CANDLES: Each Lwa has specific candle colors. Rada Lwa: white and blue. Petwo Lwa: red and black. Gede: black and purple. The candles are the Lwa's light in the physical world — they are kept burning during ceremony and often maintained between ceremonies. **BOTTLES OF LIQUOR:** Each Lwa has specific drink preferences. Rum for Gede and Ogou. Sweet liqueurs for Erzulie Freda. Cool water (never alcohol) for Damballah. The bottles on the altar are the Lwa's drinks — offered and received. **FOOD OFFERINGS:** Each Lwa has specific foods. Peanuts and candy for Legba. Honey and sweets for Erzulie Freda. Hot peppered rum for Gede (one of the tests of genuine Gede possession — the pepper rum is drunk without distress by the Gede-possessed devotee). The food is offered to the Lwa and consumed by the community after the ceremony. **SACRED OBJECTS:** Items specific to each Lwa. A skull or cross for Gede/Baron. Mirrors and perfume for Erzulie Freda. Iron implements (a machete, iron tools) for Ogou. A white cloth and cool water for Damballah. **CATHOLIC IMAGERY:** The specific saints that correspond to specific Lwa — Legba as Saint Peter or the Infant of Atocha, Erzulie Freda as Mater Dolorosa, Ogou as Saint James, Baron Samedi as Saint Gerard. These are the sacred cover the tradition developed during colonial persecution — the Lwa wearing the saints' clothes to survive. **PHOTOGRAPHS:** Images of specific ancestors or important figures in the *ounfò*'s history — the tradition's connection to its specific lineage of practitioners.

The Drums

Rada, Petwo, and What They Are Doing

The drums of the Vodou ceremony are not background music. They are the primary technology for calling the Lwa — the specific rhythmic patterns (toques) that correspond to specific Lwa and that, when played correctly in the correct ceremonial context with the correct songs, create the energetic conditions within which the Lwa's descent becomes possible.

The Rada Drums

The rada drum set consists of three double-headed drums of different sizes: the manman (mother — the largest, playing the foundational rhythm), the segon (second — playing more complex patterns against the manman), and the boula (the smallest, playing rapid decorative rhythms above the other two). Together they create the interlocking rhythmic fabric of Rada ceremony — complex, sustaining, gradually intensifying as the ceremony progresses and the Lwa's presence builds.

The Petwo Drums

The Petwo drums are a different set with a different character — smaller, higher-pitched, played with a different technique, and producing the faster, more urgent, more intense rhythms associated with the Petwo Lwa. When the ceremony shifts from Rada to Petwo, the change in the drums is immediately perceptible — the temperature of the ceremony rises, the movement of the community becomes more urgent, and the energy in the space becomes more charged.

THE TOQUE — SPECIFIC RHYTHMS FOR SPECIFIC LWA

Each Lwa has their own specific toque — a drum pattern that is uniquely associated with them and that is played when that Lwa is being called or is present. The toque is not merely a melody or a rhythm pattern; it is an energetic signature — the specific acoustic formula that corresponds to the specific Lwa's frequency. **LEGBA'S TOQUE:** Slower, stately, the opening rhythm that begins every ceremony. When Legba is being honored and the gate is being opened, the drums play with a measured, welcoming quality. **ERZULIE FREDIA'S TOQUE:** Flowing, sensuous, with a distinctive lilt that expresses her character — the rhythm of love and beauty. **OGOU'S TOQUE:** Driving, martial, intense — the drumming that matches his warrior character. **GEDE'S TOQUE:** Syncopated, irreverent, with a quality of dark humor — the rhythm of death that refuses to take itself too seriously. **FOR THE VISITOR:** You will know when the drums shift from one Lwa's toque to another — the change is dramatic and unmistakable. When you feel the rhythm change, understand that the ceremony has moved to a different Lwa. Pay attention to who descends after the rhythm shifts.

Part Eight

How to Find and Access a Vodou Ceremony

This is the most practically important section for the visitor who genuinely wants to attend a Vodou ceremony. Vodou is not a tourist attraction with a ticket booth — it is a living community's sacred practice, and access comes through relationship and through demonstrated respect.

HOW TO GAIN LEGITIMATE ACCESS

HAITI: The most direct access is in Haiti itself, where the tradition lives most fully. In Port-au-Prince, Jacmel, and the Artibonite region, active ounfò conduct regular ceremonies. The most respectful approach: • Work with a legitimate cultural organization or NGO that has established relationships with Vodou communities • Ask your guesthouse or hotel if they can connect you with a community that welcomes sincere outside visitors • The Vodou artist community in Jacmel is particularly welcoming and often has connections to ceremonial spaces **HAITIAN DIASPORA COMMUNITIES:** New York (Brooklyn, the Bronx), Miami, Boston, Montreal, and Paris all have active Haitian communities with practicing Vodou ounfò. Some are publicly accessible for specific ceremonies: • The Brooklyn Vodou community has several ounfò that periodically welcome respectful outside observers • Caribbean cultural centers sometimes host educational events that include ceremony demonstration **THE RIGHT APPROACH:** Never arrive unannounced at a peristyle expecting to observe ceremony. Contact the Houngan or Mambo in advance, explain who you are and why you want to attend, and ask for permission. A small donation to the ceremony's costs is standard and appropriate. **CULTURAL EVENTS:** Some Vodou practitioners in the diaspora participate in educational and cultural events — museum presentations, university lectures, cultural festivals — that include authentic ceremony elements. These can be a respectful first contact with the tradition. **WHAT NOT TO DO:** Do not book a 'Voodoo show' through a tourist agency in Haiti or New Orleans without thoroughly investigating whether it represents the actual tradition or a staged performance for tourists. Many such shows are neither authentic nor respectful to the tradition.

Before You Attend Preparation and Protocol

PREPARATION FOR A VODOU CEREMONY

COMMUNICATE IN ADVANCE: Contact the Houngan or Mambo before attending. Introduce yourself, explain your sincere interest, and ask what they need from you. Follow their instructions completely. **BRING A CONTRIBUTION:** A donation toward the ceremony's costs is always appropriate. Ask the Houngan or Mambo what would be most helpful — food for the feast, rum or other specific offerings, a monetary contribution. Do not arrive empty-handed. **DRESS APPROPRIATELY:** White clothing is welcomed at Rada ceremonies (the cool Lwa's color). Avoid black at Rada ceremonies (black is associated with the Gede and Petwo nations). For Petwo ceremonies, red is appropriate alongside white. When in doubt, ask the Houngan or Mambo what is preferred. **LEAVE ALCOHOL AT HOME:** Do not arrive having drunk alcohol. The ceremony requires clarity of consciousness — you are entering a space where the divine is arriving, and impaired consciousness is not appropriate. **MENTAL PREPARATION:** You are about to witness — and potentially to experience — a genuine sacred ceremony in which divine forces become present through human bodies. This is not theater. The Lwa are real. The possession is genuine. Approach it with the same quality of respectful openness you would bring to the most sacred space of any tradition. **SET AN INTENTION:** Know why you are coming. What do you genuinely want to understand, receive, or offer? A sincere intention is your most important preparation.

The Complete Ceremony Experience

What Will Happen

A VODOU FÈT — WHAT TO EXPECT

THE OPENING — CATHOLIC PRAYERS: Every Vodou ceremony begins with Catholic prayers — the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, and Apostles' Creed in French and Latin. This is the tradition's protective overlay, its historical survival strategy, and its acknowledgment of all sacred dimensions simultaneously. Stand respectfully and receive this opening. CALLING LEGBA: The drums begin. The ogan (iron bell) establishes the rhythm. The first songs are Legba's — the guardian of the gate who must open the way before any other Lwa can arrive. The community sings the Legba songs in call-and-response. If you know no Haitian Creole, you can still participate in the energy of the community's singing. THE SEQUENTIAL CALLING: The ceremony proceeds through the Lwa in their specific order — Rada first, then Petwo if applicable. Each Lwa has their specific songs, their specific toque on the drums, their specific moment in the ceremony's flow. THE DESCENTS: As the appropriate songs are sung and the drums play the specific toque, initiated devotees may begin to show signs of Lwa approach — trembling, altered movement, changed breathing. Other community members support them. The Houngan or Mambo manages the process — helping the devotee transition into full Lwa manifestation and assisting them with the specific costume and implements of that Lwa once the descent is complete. THE LWA IN MANIFESTATION: The manifested Lwa moves through the community in character — Erzulie Freda sensuous and demanding of gifts, Gede irreverent and speaking of death, Ogou fierce and direct. The community interacts with the manifested Lwa — receiving blessings, making petitions, offering specific items the Lwa is known to want. THE FEAST: Food and drink specific to the Lwa being honored are served to the community. The feast is communal, joyful, and participatory. THE CLOSING: The Lwa depart (the possessed devotees gradually return to their ordinary consciousness). Specific closing songs are sung. The ceremony ends with a collective sense of having been genuinely visited.

The Lwa Who May Arrive What to Expect

RECOGNIZING THE LWA IN MANIFESTATION

PAPA LEGBA: Typically manifests as very old and slow-moving, using a cane, speaking in a low voice. He is the first Lwa and his manifestation is often brief — just long enough to open the gate before he departs to allow others to come through. **ERZULIE FREDIA:** Immediately recognizable — sensuous, demanding of attention and gifts, moving with languid grace. She will want perfume sprayed on her body, sweet liqueur, beautiful things. She will flirt, she will bestow attention and blessing on those she favors, and she will weep at the ceremony's end. Her weeping is not sadness — it is the expression of a love too vast for the world to contain. **OGOU:** Enters with force — often arriving with a sudden energetic shift in the room. The Ogou-possessed devotee becomes imperious, direct, military in bearing. He demands rum (poured over the blade of a machete or knife if available), speaks directly about what needs to be done in specific situations, and may perform vigorous physical demonstrations of his power. **THE GEDE:** Among the most dramatic and most unmistakable manifestations — the Gede arrive with irreverence, profanity, dark humor, and a complete refusal to take the solemnities of ordinary life seriously. They speak openly of sex and death, make crude jokes, and drink the pepper rum (hot peppers soaked in rum) that is their specific test of genuine possession. Do not be offended by the Gede's language — they are doing exactly what death does: refusing to allow human pretension to survive its encounter with the real. **BARON SAMEDI:** The king of the Gede, recognizable by his top hat, dark glasses, and specific black and purple regalia. He speaks with authority about life, death, and the condition of those who seek his help. If you have a health question, Baron is the one to approach — he is simultaneously the master of death and the most powerful healer.

Spirit Possession

What Is Actually Happening

Spirit possession is the moment that most surprises, most moves, and most challenges the outside observer. A human being you may have been speaking with minutes earlier suddenly becomes entirely different — their voice changes, their personality changes, their movements change, their apparent physical capabilities change. This is not acting and it is not performance. This is what Vodou says it is: the Lwa has arrived and is using the devotee's body as their vehicle for communication with the community.

What Is Not Happening

The possessed devotee is not faking, pretending, or performing. They are not experiencing a psychological breakdown. They are not speaking in tongues in the Pentecostal sense. They are not enacting a culturally learned role. The tradition has specific tests for genuine versus performed possession — most famously the Gede's pepper rum test — and the community is expert at distinguishing between the two. The research of Maya Deren (whose 1953 film and book document the tradition with scholarly rigor) confirms that possession events include physiological changes that cannot be voluntarily produced.

What Is Happening

The Lwa — a specific divine force with a specific character and domain — has temporarily displaced the devotee's ordinary personality and is using the devotee's body as a vehicle for their own presence in the visible world. The devotee's consciousness is not destroyed — it is temporarily 'stepped aside,' in the traditional metaphor, the horse waiting while the rider uses the body. The possessed devotee typically has little or no memory of what occurred during the possession.

How to Respond as a Visitor

When a Lwa manifests in your vicinity: do not photograph the event close-up without permission. Do not back away in alarm — this is a sacred event, not a dangerous one. Do not touch the manifested Lwa without being addressed by them first. If the Lwa addresses you — which they may do, particularly if you are a visitor who has approached their altar or who carries a petition — respond honestly and respectfully. Treat the manifested Lwa as the divine presence they actually are.

The Feast

Food Offerings and Communal Eating

Every Vodou fèt includes the preparation and sharing of food specific to the Lwa being honored. This communal feast is not incidental to the ceremony — it is one of its primary sacred acts, the moment when the community shares the Lwa's specific food and thereby participates in communion with the divine presence being honored.

THE FEAST — HOW IT WORKS

OFFERED TO THE LWA FIRST: The food is placed on the altar before the Lwa's altar and offered in prayer before anyone eats. The Lwa receives the spiritual essence of the food; the physical food then becomes available to the community. **SPECIFIC FOODS FOR SPECIFIC LWA:** • Legba: Corn, peanuts, candy • Erzulie Freda: Sweet foods, honey, fine foods — the best available • Ogou: Rum, roasted meats, red beans • Gede: Hot peppered rum, peanuts, specific traditional dishes • Damballah: White foods — white rice, eggs, white sweet potatoes **THE COMMUNAL SHARING:** After the offerings, the food is distributed to all present — community members and visitors alike. Accepting the food is accepting the Lwa's blessing. Refusing is inappropriate unless you have a genuine allergy or dietary medical restriction. **THE KLEREN (HAITIAN CANE LIQUOR):** Kleren or rum may be distributed at certain points — poured on the ground as libation to the ancestors and the Lwa, and sometimes drunk communally. If you do not drink alcohol, simply indicate this respectfully and hold the glass without drinking — participating in the gesture without the substance.

How to Behave as a Guest

THE GUEST'S CODE — HOW TO BE WELCOME

POSITION YOURSELF CORRECTLY: Visitors typically stand or sit along the walls of the peristyle, in the outer area. Do not position yourself near the poteau mitan unless invited to approach it. Do not crowd the altar areas. **OBSERVE AND RECEIVE:** Your primary role is to observe with full attention and genuine receptivity. You are not there to analyze, to photograph, or to collect experiences. You are there to receive — and what you receive will depend on the quality of attention you bring. **MOVE WHEN THE ENERGY MOVES:** Vodou ceremony involves significant movement — the community dances, the Lwa manifest in different areas of the peristyle, the drums shift energy rapidly. Move respectfully with the flow. Do not block the ceremony's movement or plant yourself in a fixed position that becomes an obstacle. **SING IF YOU KNOW THE SONGS:** If you have learned any of the Vodou songs in advance (the basic Legba song, any Lwa's specific songs), singing them is a sign of respect and preparation that will be warmly received by the community. **ACCEPT WHAT IS OFFERED:** If the Houngan or Mambo offers you tirtha water, rum, food, or any other ceremonial element — accept it respectfully. The refusal of what is offered in a sacred context is always inappropriate. **ASK BEFORE APPROACHING AN ALTAR:** If you wish to approach a specific Lwa's altar to make a petition or offering, ask the Houngan or Mambo first. Some altars are more accessible than others. The approach to any altar should be accompanied by a specific intention and a specific offering. **LET YOURSELF BE MOVED:** If the drumming, the singing, the energy of the ceremony moves you emotionally — allow it. Tears, awe, joy, and even the physical urge to move to the music are all appropriate responses to a genuine sacred ceremony. Vodou is designed to move people. Let it.

What to Wear

DRESS CODE FOR VODOU CEREMONY

WHITE: The safest and most universally appropriate color for any Vodou ceremony. White is the color of the Rada Lwa's spiritual realm — pure, clear, receptive. A simple white or cream outfit (dress, skirt and top, or loose shirt and pants) is always appropriate. **FOR RADA CEREMONY:** White and/or pale blue. Avoid black, which is associated with the Petwo and Gede nations. **FOR PETWO CEREMONY:** Red is appropriate alongside white. The Petwo Lwa's energy is more intense, and the ceremony's visual vocabulary includes more red and black. **FOR GEDE CEREMONY:** Black and purple alongside white is appropriate — the Gede's colors. **PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:** • Wear clothing you can move in — Vodou ceremony involves dancing and the ceremony space can become warm • Avoid expensive or delicate clothing — the ceremony may become physically active and libations may be poured • Head covering is appreciated at many ceremonies — a white scarf is ideal • Wear flat shoes or go barefoot if the floor permits — you may be moving for extended periods **ASK IN ADVANCE:** When you contact the Houngan or Mambo, ask specifically about the appropriate dress for the ceremony you will attend. Different ounfò have different traditions and the Houngan or Mambo's guidance takes precedence over general guidelines.

What to Bring and Offer

APPROPRIATE OFFERINGS FOR A VODOU CEREMONY

A MONETARY CONTRIBUTION: The most universally appropriate offering — a contribution toward the ceremony's costs. Ask the Houngan or Mambo what amount is appropriate. Ceremonies are expensive (food for the feast, rum and other offerings for the Lwa, the drummers' payment) and visitor contributions are always appreciated.

SPECIFIC OFFERINGS FOR SPECIFIC LWA: If you know which Lwa will be honored at the ceremony, you may bring specific items:

- Legba: Candy, corn, small coins
- Erzulie Freda: Perfume, sweet liqueur, flowers, mirrors
- Ogou: Rum, red cloth
- Gede/Baron: Cigars, hot peppered rum (purchased ready-made), dark sunglasses (ceremonially appropriate)
- Damballah: White eggs, white rice, cool clean water

FOOD FOR THE FEAST: Contributing food to the communal feast is one of the most practical and most welcomed forms of offering. Ask the Houngan or Mambo what is needed — extra rice, extra beans, extra rum for the Lwa's portions.

YOUR PRESENCE AND ATTENTION: The most essential thing you bring is the quality of your presence — genuine attention, genuine respect, genuine openness. A visitor who arrives with a camera and a tourist's detachment brings less than a visitor who arrives with nothing but sincere curiosity and complete attention.

What Not to Do

PROHIBITED BEHAVIORS AT VODOU CEREMONY

DO NOT arrive without prior communication and permission from the Houngan or Mambo — never show up unannounced at a peristyle expecting to observe ceremony. DO NOT photograph the possessed devotees without explicit permission — this is both disrespectful and potentially disruptive to the possession state. DO NOT photograph the veve during active ceremony — the veve is a living sacred form while the ceremony is in progress. DO NOT touch the poteau mitan without being invited to — it is the most sacred physical object in the peristyle. DO NOT interfere with a devotee in the process of receiving a Lwa — the transition is a delicate and sacred moment. DO NOT approach a manifested Lwa unless they address you first — the Lwa will approach those they wish to interact with. DO NOT arrive intoxicated — this is a sacred ceremony and clarity of consciousness is required. DO NOT treat the ceremony as entertainment — it is not a performance. The Lwa are genuinely present. Treat them and the community with the respect due to genuine sacred encounter. DO NOT leave during the ceremony without informing the Houngan or Mambo — abrupt departures during active possession can be energetically disruptive. DO NOT share details of private communications from the Lwa — if a manifested Lwa speaks to you privately, that communication belongs to you and is not appropriate to broadcast to others.

The Haligricity Lens

The Peristyle and Sacred Space

The Vodou peristyle is the most complete and most fully operational model of sacred ceremony in the African diaspora world — a space designed with specific sacred technology (the poteau mitan, the veve, the specific altars, the specific drums, the specific sequence of the ceremony) to create the conditions within which the divine becomes genuinely, physically, undeniably present.

The Poteau Mitan and Haligric Sacred Space

The poteau mitan — the cosmic axis that connects the invisible world to the visible ceremony space — is the Vodou expression of what Haligricity holds about opening sacred space. When the Haligric practitioner opens ceremonial space through specific ritual acknowledgment of above and below, of the four directions, of the center — they are enacting the same principle as the poteau mitan: marking the specific point where the vertical divine dimension intersects the horizontal earthly plane and can be used as a portal for sacred arrival.

The Drums and Haligric Sound

The Vodou drums' specific toques — the precise rhythmic patterns that correspond to specific Lwa and that create the specific energetic conditions for their arrival — are the most technically specific ancient model of what Haligricity holds about sacred sound. The toque is a sonic code for a specific divine frequency. When the drummers play Erzulie Freda's toque, they are creating the acoustic conditions that correspond to Erzulie Freda's presence. This is not metaphor. The tradition has verified it over centuries of practice: the right rhythm, played correctly, brings the Lwa.

CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY

The Vodou ceremony's demonstration that the divine arrives through specific preparation — specific space (the poteau mitan), specific sound (the toque), specific forms (the veve), specific offerings (the altar's food and drink) — is the African diaspora's most complete confirmation of what Haligrity holds about ceremony. Sacred ceremony is not sincere intention alone. It is sincere intention expressed through specific, learnable, practiced technique — the alignment of Feeling (sincere intention), Thinking (knowing the proper forms), Speaking (the correct songs), and Doing (the specific physical acts of preparation and offering). When all four are aligned, the Lwa arrive. When all four Tetralty dimensions are aligned, the sacred arrives. Grand Rising.

*"Fok nou rele Legba pou li louvri baye a.
We must call Legba to open the gate."*

— Traditional Vodou ceremonial opening

The gate is open. The drums are speaking in a language older than writing. The poteau mitan connects this floor to the floor of heaven. The Lwa are not mythology — they are arriving, right now, in the bodies of the people around you who have spent their lives preparing to receive them. Come with that knowledge. Come with that respect. Come knowing that what you are witnessing is the same recognition as every other tradition in this library — that the divine is real, that it can be called, and that it will come when it is properly called. Grand Rising.

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